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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Leading media reported that President Bush called Acting PM Ehud Olmert to congratulate him over Kadima's election victory and to invite him to the White House after he forms his new government. Maariv and the leading news web site Ynet reported that Olmert promised the President that he would assemble a broad-based coalition as soon as possible. Maariv also wrote that Olmert promised Bush that like Sharon, he would make efforts at progress in the peace process. Maariv and Israel Radio also reported that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak congratulated Olmert and invited him to visit Egypt.

All newspapers led with matters related to Olmert's efforts to form a government coalition, the most prominent topic being the finance portfolio, claimed both by Kadima and the Labor Party. Ha'aretz quoted Olmert associates as saying that if there was no choice, the Defense Ministry could go to the Labor Party. Olmert was quoted as saying in an interview with Maariv that he would not rule out asking the Likud to join his coalition. Ha'aretz reported that on Wednesday, the right-wing parties Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu, which seek to put together a government without Kadima, contacted Labor Party Chairman Amir Peretz, offering him the post of prime minister if he forms a coalition with the right. The media speculated on the possible cost of a "social" government. All media reported on growing calls on Binyamin Netanyahu and Yossi Beilin to resign the leadership of their respective parties (Likud and Meretz) in the wake of the poor results their parties achieved in the elections.

Ha'aretz reported that many US Jews were please by the Israeli election's results.

Israel Radio and Ynet reported that the UN Security Council unanimously decided to give Iran 30 days to suspend its nuclear enrichment activity. The radio said that Russia and China toned down the language of the resolution. Israel Radio also reported that President Bush reiterated his concern about Iran's nuclear program.

All media (emphasis in Ha'aretz) quoted Palestinian PM Ismail Haniyeh as saying on Wednesday after the swearing-in ceremony for his cabinet in Gaza that the Hamas government is prepared to give negotiations between PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas and Israel a chance. Ha'aretz quoted Haniyeh as saying: "If what Abu Mazen presents to the people as a result of negotiations serves its interest, then we too will redefine our position." Leading media reported that in Khartoum on Wednesday, Abbas called on the new Israeli leadership "to work to stop the wars and threats and to choose the option of peace." Abbas was further quoted as saying: "We are prepared to resume immediate

negotiations with Israel but the new government must abandon the intention to impose solutions in a unilateral manner." Ha'aretz reported that sources in the Israeli defense establishment told the newspaper last night that the question of relations with the PA will be discussed today at Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz's weekly situation assessment with senior IDF and Shin Bet officials. Ha'aretz quoted the sources as saying that officers have not been given any new directives regarding coordinating security with their colleagues in the PA. The sources were quoted as saying that the officers understand that they cannot liaise with officials or security people affiliated with Hamas, but that meetings are otherwise permitted for now. Ha'aretz quoted State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack as saying on Wednesday that US diplomats were instructed to clarify beforehand whether Palestinian officials were affiliated with Hamas, since US law forbids any exchange with members of a terrorist organization. Yediot reported on the US decision without citing McCormack.

Ha'aretz cited the belief expressed by senior GOI sources in Jerusalem Wednesday that Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch and Deputy US National Security Advisor Elliott Abrams will today demand, during their meetings with Israel's political and military leadership, that the passages for goods into the Gaza Strip remain open. The Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio reported that soon after Hamas formally took power on Wednesday, Canada announced it was suspending aid to the PA. The radio reported that Canada would continue humanitarian aid through UN agencies.

All media reported that on Wednesday, a would-be suicide bomber was apprehended at an IDF checkpoint in the Jordan Valley. He was allegedly on his way to carry out an attack in central Israel.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the US did not comment on the election of Rafi Eitan, leader of the Gil Pensioners' Party, to the Knesset. Eitan is considered an "unindicted co-conspirator" in the Jonathan Pollard spy case and might be taken in for questioning if he enters the US.

Maariv reported that an interview with the Israeli Ambassador to the US on Instapundit, the most popular "blog" in the US, has become a hit.

All media reported that Daylight Saving Time begins at 2:00 a.m. on Friday, when clocks will be moved forward to 3:00 a.m. Until the US begins Daylight Saving Time at 2:00 a.m., April 2, Israel will be eight hours ahead of the Eastern US rather than the current seven.

Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The statements voiced [in Israel] in the past 24 hours, according to which withdrawing from the West Bank is not an urgent matter and may not occur during the government's first year, are very disturbing."

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in Ha'aretz: "If Olmert wants American recognition, withdrawal to the separation fence will only be the opening position."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Further withdrawals would be irresponsible without first reaching an effective agreement with the international community providing tangible diplomatic benefits for Israel."

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach commented in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "[Olmert] will have to exhaust every avenue of talks with a Palestinian partner."

Contributor Yakov Shaus wrote in conservative Russian-language daily Vesty: "Under the current political situation it doesn't look as though a durable government capable of surviving through the next elections is being created."

Block Quotes:

I. "Kadima's Historic Role"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (March 30): "On election eve, Ehud Olmert promised to bring into his government only partners that would declare support for a unilateral disengagement from the West Bank. That must be the basic condition for forming the government, and it is, in effect, the *raison d'être* of any government led by Kadima -- a party with one clear mission, in whose hands the Israeli public has entrusted the historic task of leaving the West Bank. The statements voiced in the past 24 hours, according to which withdrawing from the West Bank is not an urgent matter and may not occur during the government's first year, are very disturbing. If this measure is not carried out soon, it may never be done at all."

II. "Olmert's Troubles Ahead"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in Ha'aretz (March 30): "All of Olmert's predecessors since the outbreak of the first Intifada have ended their terms to the left of the positions on which they were elected.... It's hard to believe that Olmert will manage to break this tradition, or will even try to do so -- certainly not after the election results strengthened the left wing of his future coalition. The conclusion is that if Olmert wants American recognition, withdrawal to the separation fence will only be the opening position. That means that even the sacred settlement blocs, the stronghold of Israeli consensus, will have to shrink.... The [resulting] map [was] accepted by the Palestinian partners to the Geneva initiative, and it will allow the Americans to argue that it will form the basis of a viable Palestinian state in the future. These decisions remain in the distance. First, Olmert will have to establish a coalition and waste a few months ostensibly 'searching for a partner' on the Palestinian side before turning to implementation of a unilateral withdrawal in the West Bank. But his policy is leading him to the point where he will have to retract his pre-elections statement that /Ariel is Israel.' And then people will be able to argue that Olmert, too, is not fulfilling his promises."

III. "Olmert's Obligations"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (March 30): "Olmert bravely jettisoned much of the ambiguity he had inherited from Sharon as to his future path. Rather than continuing to claim, as Sharon had done, that he had 'no plans' for further withdrawals, Olmert promised to establish our 'permanent borders' by 'converging' tens of thousands of Judea and Samaria [i.e. West Bank] settlers behind a completed security fence.... Now that the election is behind us, it is very important that Olmert resolve the conflict between conciliatory statements and potential heavy-handed action by reiterating his promise to consult, and by implementing that promise in a sincere and serious way. The public much preferred the balance struck between sensitivity, persuasion and force employed during the evacuation of the Gaza settlements to that displayed at Amona. Nor is sensitivity enough. Kadima has pledged not only that it would preserve as wide an internal consensus as possible, but that international support for its plan would be sought as well. The latter is not a luxury but a necessity; though called 'unilateral,' further withdrawals would be irresponsible without first reaching an effective agreement with the international community providing tangible diplomatic benefits for Israel.... The internal and external aspects are directly related: the more the government is able to deliver significant international benefits, the more understanding and support it will receive here at home."

IV. "Stalled Unilateralism"

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach commented in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 30): "Olmert's election promise of a year to a year and a half of attempts to engage in negotiations is turning into a buoy for him and his future government. He'll have to exhaust every avenue of talks with a Palestinian partner: Even with an Abu-Mazen with plucked feathers and -- saying it aloud or not -- with the Hamas government. With all the boasting about drying up the Palestinian Authority and [applying] international pressure in order to topple it, Ismail Haniyeh's status looks no less stable this morning than Ehud Olmert's. This is a blow to the futile dream, according to which Israel can determine its borders and its future by itself, and act as if the Palestinians do

not exist. This is also a blow to the flight from reality that made most Israelis ignore the ... withdrawal from Gaza and its consequences."

1V. "The Diminishing, Still to Be Formed Coalition "

Contributor Yakov Shaus wrote in conservative Russian-language Vesty (March 30): "Following the Oslo agreements, the differences between the right and the left [in Israel] started disappearing.... Will Prime Minister Olmert be able to create a national consensus? If the Labor Party and Meretz-Yahad join the coalition, [Israel] will quickly lean to the left ... start talks with Hamas thus, as always, leading to a situation in which terrorists would be getting more than [originally] expected and [the number of] terror attacks increase. [Then], the opposition [to Olmert's government] supported by ultra-Orthodox would press for early elections. Olmert might try to avoid leaning on the left wing, but he ... already warned that supporting the unilateral disengagement policy would be a condition for joining the coalition.... Even in case Lieberman as a pragmatic politician [joins the coalition] ... he won't abandon his intention to become the national camp's leader, and therefore . [after some time] ... with the support of the right wing and ultra-Orthodox parties would bring down the government.. Nobody in Kadima could ... compete with Sharon, but Olmert is not seen as a national leader: everybody understands that he got the party as a gift for his loyalty to Sharon.... Under the current political situation it doesn't look as though a durable government capable of surviving through the next elections is being created."

JONES